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# Europeanisation through the prism of regime complexity: the case of French aid

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## ABSTRACT

The challenge of isolating the impact of Europeanisation is an arduous one, which explains why analysts have preferred complex rather than parsimonious explanations of this phenomenon. Given this predilection among scholars, it is surprising that the concept of regime complexity has not been meaningfully applied in the Europeanisation literature. This article lays some initial groundwork for assessing whether regime complexity has weakened or reinforced the impact of Europeanisation, with reference specifically to French aid. This article begins by highlighting the limited impact of Europeanisation on French assistance in the early decades of European integration. Next, it demonstrates how the climate became more propitious as from the late 1990s following domestic reforms, increased European Union (EU) pressures and the emergence of an aid regime complex. Drawing on elite interviews, it shows how France has become more receptive to Europeanisation, while also using regime complexity to reframe EU norms. Finally, it explains why and how France has resisted Europeanisation and explores the wider significance of the French case and of regime complexity.


## KEYWORDS

Regime complexity; French aid; Europeanisation; EU development policy; policy coherence for development; aid effectiveness

## Introduction

The concept of Europeanisation cuts across debates between intergovernmentalists and liberal institutionalists and between rationalists and constructivists. Yet it has given rise to its own debates. One of these, on the nature of Europeanisation, has been widely rehearsed (e.g. Harmsen & Wilson, 2000) and need not be revisited here. Another, more central to this study, revolves around the challenges of disentangling the effect of Europeanisation – that is, ‘the impact of the EU on its member states’ domestic spheres’ (Börzel & Risse, 2006, p. 485) – from that of domestic variables and internationalisation. The task of isolating the ‘net EU impact’ (Levi-Faur, 2004) is an arduous one, which helps explain why scholars have preferred complex rather than parsimonious explanations (Exadaktylos & Radaelli, 2009, p. 526). Given this predilection, it is surprising that the concept of ‘international regime complexity’ has yet to be meaningfully employed in the Europeanisation literature.<sup>1</sup>

The regime concept is already familiar to International Relations scholars and refers to ‘implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which

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actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations' (Krasner, 1983, p. 1). Regime theory generally emphasises the role of a single institutional point bringing states together by reducing the transaction costs of rule-creation and increasing the reputational damage of rule-breaking (Orsini et al., 2013, p. 29). However, a more recent contribution to thinking involves 'regime complexity', that is, 'nested, partially overlapping, and parallel international regimes that are not hierarchically ordered' (Alter & Meunier, 2009, p. 13).<sup>2</sup> Regime complexes are marked by more than one institutional focal point and exhibit divergence regarding the norms governing them.

This article lays some initial groundwork for assessing whether regime complexity has reinforced or weakened the impact of Europeanisation, with reference specifically to the official development assistance (ODA) structures and policies of a leading European Union (EU) member state (MS), France. In so doing, it provides an original take on regime complexity as a tool for identifying the effect of EU pressures.<sup>3</sup> It also contributes to the debate on whether regime complexes increase or reduce pressures for norm compliance (Drezner, 2009). Finally, it brings MSs back into the study of EU development policy and sheds light on the French aid programme, which is a hard case for testing Europeanisation (Claeys, 2004), given that France was the original architect behind the common European development policy and has retained the capacity and willingness to resist EU pressures on its bilateral aid (Balleix, 2010).

In order to make this contribution, this article examines the limited Europeanisation of France's aid polity (or structures) and policy over the early decades of European integration. Next, it identifies factors that have facilitated Europeanisation since France's aid reforms in the late 1990s, focusing on declining French influence, enhanced EU pressures and the emerging aid regime complex. Drawing upon 18 elite interviews in Paris, London and Brussels, this study then assesses the EU's enhanced, but still limited, impact on French ODA. It explains why and how France has resisted Europeanisation by drawing on veto players and strategic ambiguities created by regime complexity. It concludes by exploring the wider significance of the French case and of regime complexity.

## Research parameters

Before proceeding, it is worth noting, first of all this analysis does not assume that Europeanisation should take place or that it is being systematically pursued by Brussels. Second, it does not enter into the debate between rationalists, who see MSs acting out of a logic of consequentiality, and constructivists, who emphasise a logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998). Instead, both perspectives are drawn on, even if greater emphasis is placed on France's rational pursuit of the 'national interest'. Third, while the focus here is primarily on top-down Europeanisation, it is impossible, in the case of established MSs such as France, to disregard instances of uploading (France → EU) and cross-loading (e.g. France plus MS → EU). Indeed, the choice of a regime complexity perspective actually lends itself to a multi-dimensional take on Europeanisation.

Fourth, the emphasis is on the EU's effect on France's aid policies and polity, since these are areas where there is evidence of Europeanisation. The impact on the third 'p' – the politics of French policy-making – is harder to demonstrate. To illustrate, while the French business lobby has adapted its lobbying to secure lucrative EU aid contracts, with 30 French businesses now having offices in Brussels, it continues to prioritise France's

export credit guarantee department as a funding source (Karpeles, 2011, p. 8). Equally, while French non-governmental organisation (NGO) platforms have benefited from EU funding, they have continued to prioritise their own development agenda and have kept up that their criticism of EU subsidies and dumping (CRID, 2003). Significantly too, 'the level of Europeanisation of the French Parliament still appears [...] modest [...]. Outside of the small club of EU Committee members, French MPs [...] hardly ever deal with Community matters' (Rozenberg, 2011, p. 16).

Finally, this research does not set out to capture the myriad of norms, forums and strategies associated with the aid regime complex. Instead, the focus is limited to the consequences of this complex: has it reinforced pressures for Europeanisation or helped France avoid EU-backed norms by drawing upon the following strategies: 'forum shopping' (selecting or creating an amenable alternative venue), 'norm-stretching' or 'shifting' (bending rules or reframing norms in advantageous ways) and 'regime-shifting' (altering the premise on which a regime is based)?

The impact of the traditional aid regime over the early post-colonial decades has been examined by scholars, such as Lumsdaine (1993), who show how this was dominated by a hegemon, the US-backed World Bank, with its influential development *nostra*, and supported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC), with its peer reviews, and the United Nations (UN), with its aid volume targets. The European Commission assumed a norm-taker or 'cash dispenser' role (Petit, 2013, p. 175), while around twenty DAC state donors adhered informally to collective regime norms. The transition to a regime complex began in the mid-1990s as more diverse donors entered the fold. These included philanthropic organisations, such as the Gates Foundation (created in 1997), countless Southern and Northern civil society organisations (CSOs), multinational companies, diasporas, former aid recipients like the central and east European states, the Gulf states and other emerging powers, such as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China).

## Early traces of Europeanisation

Space constraints do not allow for a detailed chronological account of the Europeanisation of French aid over several decades (1957–97). Instead, this section provides a thematic overview of areas where European pressures might be expected to have impacted on French aid structures and policies (specifically on ODA volumes, quality and coherence).

To begin with EU pressures on French aid structures, the emergence of a common development policy from the outset of the European project was bound to elicit an institutional response from the French government. As well as establishing a permanent representation in Brussels, France created, in 1963, a system of information exchange between the French Cooperation Ministry and the European Commission. It also centralised responsibility for ministerial dealings with Europe in the hands of the *Secrétariat général du comité interministériel* (SGCI), a unit based in the Prime Minister's office (Harmsen, 1999, p. 88). These structural adaptations were, however, minor compared to France's impact on Europe's aid architecture. In this context, Claeys (2004, p. 113) contends that the European Commission was originally built 'to French administrative specifications', while Dimier (2013, p. 32) argues that the European Development Fund (EDF) – which finances Europe's aid and trade conventions with former colonies – 'reproduced



the mechanisms of the Fund for Economic and Social Development, which France set up in 1946' for its bilateral assistance programme. Equally, Bué (2011, p. 86) suggests that the European Commission's Directorate-General for Development was 'an institutional anachronism', concentrating on France's ex-colonies.

Turning to aid policy, here the EU's influence is harder to discern. Thus, while the European Commission did persuade France to increase bilateral pledges to successive EDFs (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p. 116), it did not press meaningfully for an overall rise in French aid volumes. It follows that the ODA increases that did occur under French Presidents François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac had less to do with the EU than with France's geopolitical ambitions and readiness to work towards regime norms such as the UN's development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI). The EU also did little to encourage France to improve its aid quality, taken here to refer to untying (the delinking of development assistance from exports) and aid concessionality (the grant-element of ODA). Once again, the fact that improvements did take place in aid quality – France untied 45.3 per cent of ODA 1988 compared to 38.5 per cent in 1974–75, while also stabilising the grant level of its ODA at around 90 per cent over this same period – should be attributed less to EU demands than to small-scale campaigns by French NGOs and peer review pressures from fellow DAC donors (Cumming, 2001).

The EU was more proactive in calling for closer coordination between the Commission and the MSs. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty introduced guidelines on the 3Cs (coordination, complementarity and coherence) and stipulated, in Article 130x, that 'the Community and the Member States shall coordinate their policies on development cooperation'. In response, France could point to priorities, such as Africa, infrastructure and rural development, which it shared with the Commission. In reality, however, these had been French priorities long before the EU adopted them, and there was little sign that France was about to fall into line behind the Commission in its ambition to coordinate MS aid policies (Petit, 2013, p. 175).

Overall, the limited impact of Europeanisation must be understood in terms of France's dominant influence in Europe prior to the UK's accession in 1973. It was after all the French who appointed every European Development Commissioner until 1984 and who had 'instigated the entire "development cooperation" element of European policy' (Frisch, 2013, p. 110) by making the creation of the Association a condition of its membership of the EU. France's dominance meant that it had the institutional capacity and technical expertise not only to resist soft EU pressures and pursue a Gaullist 'France first' policy instead (Wong, 2006, p. 205), but also to use the EU as a platform to resist norms arising out of the World Bank-led aid regime. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, French policy-makers legitimised their ad hoc, neo-colonial aid practices in Africa by observing that Jacques Ferrandi's pragmatic, intuitive approach to project selection, had become "'the doctrine" of DG VIII' and offered 'a way of distancing [the EU's] action from that of other donors such as the World Bank, regarded as far too "technocratic"' (Dimier, 2013, p. 38). In the 1980s, too, French officials used the EU's partnership model, its support for elements of the New International Economic Order, and its reservations regarding the Bank's structural adjustment programmes (Interview with Dieter Frisch, 2011), to bolster France's stance against the emerging orthodoxy – the *pensée unique*, which rejected state-directed development in favour of the market – and justify its continued subsidisation of the Franc Zone, a protectionist currency-support mechanism, mainly for ex-French African colonies (Wilson, 1993).

## The new context for Europeanisation

The late 1990s offered a more propitious climate for Europeanisation, thanks to domestic French reforms, greater EU pressures and the political space opened up by the emerging aid regime complex. On the domestic front, the French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin undertook the largest ever overhaul of French aid. By 1999, Jospin's government had merged the Cooperation Ministry (effectively the Ministry for Francophone Africa) into the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), transferred lead responsibility for aid to a more professional agency, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and drawn a line under France's much-criticised neo-colonial aid practices, linked to *FrançAfrique* (Meimon, 2007). In so doing, Jospin was not so much Europeanising as normalising French ODA by aligning it to New Public Management (NPM) principles, which, though not originally European, were championed by the EU in the 1990s (Rozenberg, 2011).

These reforms pointed to a new awareness that France could no longer tackle single-handedly the challenges of Africa and that it would need to work increasingly through the EU, even if that resulted in French policies being 'at least partially Europeanized' (Charillon & Wong, 2011, p. 19). With French ODA under budgetary pressure from the Maastricht process, public spending reviews and the 2008 global financial crisis, there was a growing recognition that the EU, as a 'development champion', was a 'rational choice' (Bué, 2011, p. 85) for France as a declining great power. The EU offered a multiplier effect, since as one MFA official put it, 'Where France gives 15 million euros, the EDF gives 300 million' (Interview, 2014). It was 'symbolically useful' too, providing a cover for unpopular collective actions such as aid sanctions and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs, Europe's free trade agreements with different African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions), a voice in forums where France was under-represented, and a legitimising force for difficult domestic cutbacks. In this latter context, the EU's Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in development policy helped the French administration to justify reductions in aid and diplomatic staff (Balleix, 2010).

French policy-makers did, moreover, recognise the need to do more, in an enlarged Europe to capitalise on their contributions to the EU, which now amount to a quarter of all French aid (Peyronnet & Cambon, 2012, p. 137). To this end, France prepared White Papers (e.g. MFA, 2008), commissioned evaluations of, for example, France's impact on the 10th EDF (MFA, 2014), and wrote strategy papers, such as the MFA's 2010 'What should Europe's policy be on development?' and its 2011 'Framework Document' (Coopération au Développement: Une Vision Française). This latter document in particular is viewed by French officials as a key source of inspiration behind the EU's 2012 'Agenda for Change', with its emphasis on Africa, the Mediterranean and aid differentiation (Interview with AFD officials, 2014). The likelihood is that France's desire to shape EU thinking will intensify if the EU can – by drawing on its greater size (now 28 member countries), aid volumes (over 55 per cent of global aid) and development effectiveness (OECD, 2012, p. 13) – truly establish itself as a norm-setter internationally.

Just as French policy-makers were recognising the need to collaborate more with the EU, so the EU was increasing its pressures on MSs and firming up its *acquis* in terms of development policy via new Treaties, Commission communications and Council conclusions. This *acquis* can be likened to a 'European aid regime', some of whose norms (e.g. on untying) have their origins in the World Bank/OECD-led regime, while others

(e.g. on policy coherence and support for the EDF) are more distinctively European. It has been bolstered by the actions of the European Commission as a norm entrepreneur, engaging in 'purposeful opportunism' and exercising its 'right of initiative' (Bué, 2011, p. 92) in support of NGOs. Typically, the EU has provided around 60 per cent of official French NGO funding as well as 50 per cent of the monies received by CONCORD, Europe's confederation of national NGO platforms) (CONCORD, 2014). In so doing, it has impacted on development politics in France by helping these NGOs hold the government to account on its European aid commitments. That French NGOs are not opposed to championing the European cause is perhaps not surprising given that the French public has remained supportive of the European Commission, which is ranked ahead of donor states and private donors in terms of credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness (Ipsos, 2013, p. 6).<sup>4</sup> That French NGOs are also attached to European ODA is clear from the fact that they planned, in 2014, a campaign to ensure that France did not disengage from the EDF (Interview with Coordination Sud, 2014). It can equally be inferred from the responsiveness of the French national NGO platform, Coordination Sud, to requests for information for Delegation Watch (a CONCORD report monitoring exchanges between EU delegations and CSOs) and the EU's annual 'European Development Report' (Interview with Coordination Sud, 2014).

Finally, the emergence of the aid regime complex has offered new opportunities. This complex has materialised due to a rebalancing of the global economy in favour of emerging countries as well as a growing donor recognition of both the challenges posed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the need to go beyond aid. This blurring of the distinction between ODA and 'ODA plus' and between OECD and non-OECD donors has weakened the original focal point for aid, specifically the World Bank (Cumming, 2001). It has, equally, created space for other actors like NGOs, many of which have been pushing for norms similar to those enshrined within the EU development *acquis*, and, crucially, the EU itself, which has endeavoured to embed itself better within, and make its presence felt across, the complex. Yet while the EU has sought to carve out a norm-setter role internationally – the 2005 European Consensus on Development, for example, was supposed to offer an alternative to the Washington Consensus with its emphasis on 'more and better aid' (Carbone, 2013, p. 487) – it has had to invest so much energy into coordinating its approach that it has been unable to shape most international aid debates or challenge the neoliberal paradigm (Farrell, 2008, p. 235). Indeed, the EU has, in establishing its presence within international organisations, ended up embracing some neoliberal orthodoxies: its advocacy of EPAs and its alignment to World Bank thinking on governance are illustrative in this regard (Arts & Dickson, 2004). The fact that the EU has become more supportive of neoliberal meta-norms has inevitably increased the reputational costs to France of norm defection as well as making it harder for it to use the EU to justify a strand of French development policy (e.g. on food sovereignty and commodity price stabilisation) that fits uncomfortably with free-market thinking.

### **Adapting to or 'complexifying' Europeanisation?**

In light of this 'new season' of European pressures (Carbone, 2008a) and of the overhaul of EU institutions and instruments that took place in the 2000s (Orbie, 2012), it seems reasonable to expect France's aid polity and policies to have adapted to these new realities.



On the institutional front, the biggest change has been the rise of France's development agency/bank, the AFD, which has seen a 35 per cent increase in personnel and a five-fold increase in activities over the past decade (OECD, 2013, pp. 17, 64). The AFD's ascendancy has been facilitated by the EU, which has accredited it, after a 'rigorous six-pillar assessment process in 2007', as a channel for disbursing funds delegated by the European Commission (Interview in Brussels, 2014). Other institutional adaptations include the opening of an AFD office in Brussels in 2002. Also in 2002, the MFA provided a development counsellor in support of its existing Africa counsellor (Balleix, 2010, p. 98). In addition, the MFA and AFD both second national experts: while these postings are intended to help upload French preferences to the EU, they nonetheless expose French policy-makers to the EU's dense policy-making environment, which has had 'a socialising effect, particularly on younger, open-minded French officials' (Interview in Brussels, 2014).

That aside, it would be wrong to overstate the impact of Europeanisation on France's aid polity. Arguably, the rise of the AFD is better explained in terms of French domestic variables (such as the MFA's failure to control its budget in 2002 (Meimon, 2007, p. 46)) and international factors (such as the rise of NPM theories, which had been espoused by the World Bank and were then brought back to France by Jean-Michel Severino, an outgoing World Bank Vice-President (1997–2000) and the incoming Head of the AFD (2001–10) (Interview with AFD, 2014). Ultimately too, the scale of France's institutional change has remained limited, with little 'convergence towards a common [European] institutional model' (Harmsen, 1999, p. 82), no closures of overseas missions in favour of the EU, and few changes to the SGCI, now relabelled the SGAE (*Secrétariat général des affaires européennes*), which continues to act as a centralising force, restricting the freedom of manoeuvre of France's permanent representation in Brussels (Rozenberg, 2011, p. 14).

## Size matters

Turning to policy matters, the EU has stepped up pressure on ODA volumes. Thus, the European Council, at its 2002 Barcelona summit, and subsequently the UN Monterrey Conference, persuaded MSs to commit to spending at least 0.33 per cent of GNI individually on aid and 0.39 per cent collectively by 2006 (Orbie, 2003). When this latter target was met before the deadline, MSs pledged in 2005 to reach 0.56 per cent by 2010 and 0.7 per cent by 2015, with half of the increase going to Africa (Carbone, 2007). These pressures have come on top of longstanding EU calls for France to maintain its contributions to the EDF and recent requests, via the open method of coordination, for voluntary contributions to regional trust funds. France has taken these targets seriously, even if it adopted a low-profile during negotiations on the 'Monterrey agenda' (Orbie, 2003; Carbone, 2007). Thus, French aid rose from USD 5.3 billion or 0.32 per cent of GNI in 2001 to USD 10.6 billion or 0.47 per cent in 2006. With USD 12.9 billion or 0.50 per cent of GNI in 2010, France came close to the interim objective of 0.51 per cent. France has, not unexpectedly, done better on its commitments to Africa, doubling ODA to the continent between 2000 and 2009 (OECD, 2013). Unsurprisingly too, France has continued to contribute heavily to EU efforts, increasing the share of its aid through the EU from 10.5 per cent in 2002 to 23.1 per cent in 2008 (Balleix, 2010, p. 95).

That said, it would be misleading to link rises in French ODA too closely to EU pressures. In fact, French officials have 'not felt under any particular pressure from the EU' (Interview

in Brussels, 2014), which has only recently added its voice to longstanding demands from the UN, the DAC, and French civil society. Furthermore, rising ODA trends began as early as 2000, and a number of European non-EU (e.g. Switzerland) and non-European countries (like the USA and Japan) have raised their aid budgets over this same period (OECD, various years). Crucially too, France has not performed well on some targets. French ODA fell to 0.46 per cent in 2011–12 and is only set to reach 0.48 per cent in 2015 (OECD, 2013, p. 48). The French contribution to the EDF has, moreover, decreased from 24.3 per cent (EDF 9) to 17.5 per cent (EDF 11), which reflects a fall in real terms, given that the current EDF is over seven not six years and includes more contributors (Interview with MFA, 2014). In addition, France is calling for a move away from bilateral pledges to the EDF and towards the budgetisation of aid to the ACP, with a view to repatriating 2 per cent of its current contributions and narrowing the gap between its voluntary EDF and fixed Community budget contributions (Peyronnet & Cambon, 2012, p. 154).

The fact that France has been so far off the 0.7 per cent aid target has been brushed aside by the French government, which has simply promised to resume its efforts after the recession (OECD, 2013). However, behind the scenes, France has endeavoured to camouflage this failure by ‘complexifying’ this normative aid target. It has, in other words, refracted it through the prism of regime complexity, using strategies such as norm-stretching, forum shopping/creation and regime-shifting. While norm-stretching is not unusual in donor circles, France is the second worst European culprit (after Austria) in terms of inflating its aid figures, with 50 per cent of French ODA consisting of non-aid items (Hayes, 2007). An example of forum shopping/creation is France’s establishment of the permanent secretariat to the Leading Group on Innovative Financing within the G20. In creating this grouping, France has diverted attention away from its poor record on aid volumes and towards its creative solutions for going beyond aid financing, through its airline ticket tax to fund UNITAID, and its promotion of a development-friendly European Financial Transactions Tax.

Finally, France has attempted to regime-shift by altering the basis on which ODA figures are calculated. AFD Director Jean-Michel Severino has been central to these efforts, arguing within the DAC and in influential publications (Severino & Ray, 2011) that donors should abandon arbitrary targets based on ODA (against which France is performing badly) and embrace a more eclectic measure of concessional flows to developing countries (against which France is performing well) that includes migrant remittances, innovative financing and expenditure on global public goods.

## Quality counts

Aid quality is another area where the EU has sought to exert influence. The EU has, since 2001, been at ‘the centre of the debates on untying of aid’ and pushed, albeit unsuccessfully, for the untying of food aid and technical assistance (Carbone, 2014, p. 108). Equally, the European Commission has long been a leading exponent of higher levels of aid concessionality. In 2005, the European Consensus on Development stressed that the ‘majority of Community aid will continue to be provided in the form of grants, which is particularly suitable for the poorest countries’.

France has not been oblivious to these pressures. It was, in fact, persuaded by the European Commission to drop its reservations to the 2001 DAC Recommendation on untying

of aid in exchange for a commitment on burden-sharing by donors that were allocating less aid to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (*Financial Times*, 23 June 2000). France has fulfilled its commitments on ODA untying given at the 2008 Accra High Level Forum on aid effectiveness: 95 per cent of French bilateral assistance was untied in 2010, compared to 85 per cent in 2008, while, in 2009 and 2010, almost 100 per cent of French ODA to LDCs was untied (OECD, 2013). While France's record on concessionality has been poorer, it has nonetheless targeted its shrinking grant-aid on poor countries, particularly the 17 priority recipients, mainly in francophone Africa, identified in the MFA's 2011 'Framework Document on Development Cooperation'.

That said, it would be wrong to link France's performance on aid quality too closely to European pressures. In fact, the trend towards enhanced quality is a longstanding one and applies to countries outside the EU, as the total proportion of OECD formally untied aid has risen from 40 per cent in 2000 to 76 per cent in 2010 (Carbone, 2014, p. 105). Furthermore, the key driver on quality has been the DAC, whose Secretariat secured the 2001 DAC Recommendation on untying of aid and established conventions for monitoring the grant-element of aid (Carbone, 2014, p. 105). Equally, domestic pressure groups such as the Observatoire Permanent de la Coopération Française have campaigned in favour of untying, while, France's audit commission, the Cour des Comptes (2012), has criticised recent increases in loans relative to grants. Significantly too, France's actual performance on aid quality has remained patchy. To illustrate, Paris has continued to engage in informal tying: by seconding officials to ministries in recipient countries where they can influence contract selection; by hardening 'social and environmental norms regulating the allocation of AFD-financed tenders in Africa' (with a view to discouraging Chinese competition); and by incrementally moving contracts away from infrastructure projects towards sectors, like water sanitation, where French companies are competitive (Darracq, undated, p. 28). More worryingly, France's performance on aid concessionality has slumped. In 2010, Paris failed to comply with the OECD's minimum grant requirement and, in 2011, provided a lower share of ODA (86.2 per cent) in grant form than any other DAC donor (OECD, 2013, p. 114).

To understand France's approach, reference is required to regime complexity. Thus, in the case of aid tying, French policy-makers have engaged in a limited form of forum shopping. They have taken stock of radically different approaches to untying in other parts of the regime complex, particularly in the emerging powers, which are pro-tying, but also in the EU's new MSs and DAC donors such as Japan and the USA, which are untying laggards. Emboldened by the lack of stickiness of this norm, French politicians, such as Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, have insisted that aid should benefit French companies more, whilst stopping short of demanding a return to tying (OECD, 2013, p. 26).

Turning to concessionality, here French officials have gone further and sought to replace an established EU norm, whereby grant-aid is the preferred modality for most developing countries, with a new norm, blending, which involves various combinations of grants and loans. Drawing upon its legal and technical expertise, particularly its experience over the last sixty years as a development bank, the AFD has, with strong support from the German development agency KfW and the European Investment Bank (EIB), constructed a cogent case for blending, arguing that loans are quicker, better at encouraging self-reliance, and larger than grants. France has in the process 'evangelised' the EU and ensured a 'silent revolution' (Interview in Brussels, 2014), whereby the European Commission, anxious to mobilise larger financial flows in support of the MDGs, has now embraced

this 'radically different modality', channelling 2 billion of its 56 billion euro budget to blending projects and opening up national as well as regional indicative programme monies for these operations (Interview with AFD, 2014). French policy-makers have, moreover, sought to render permanent this normative shift by helping to create new forums, specifically a Blending Platform, a Mutual Reliance Initiative to finance blending, and regional funds – including the Africa–EU Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF), established in 2007 – that combine EU grants with private sector investment.

## Coherence

Another area where the EU has sought to shape MS programmes has been coherence. It has promoted both horizontal coherence (involving synergies between two or more development-related policies) and vertical coherence (involving interactions between the EU's supranational level and MSs). The EU launched its policy coherence for development (PCD) agenda in 2005, establishing specific commitments in 12 inter-related policy areas and creating an inter-service group on PCD. Other measures included the Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in 2007, a related Fast-Track initiative in 2008, and joint programming in 2012. This latter process stipulates that only three donors should operate in any particular sector of a recipient country and that donors should not participate in more than five sectors. It has been piloted in five countries, with plans being taken forward in another 40 (European Commission, 2014, p. 7).

France has been receptive to these pressures, making PCD part of the French development minister's brief and promoting synergies between development and other policies. France has, for example, pushed hard within the EU, for climate change concerns to be better integrated into development policies (Interview with MFA, 2014). It has, moreover, championed food security within the G20 and worked hard to bolster the capacity of developing countries to meet the food standards governing access to European markets (Assemblée Nationale, 2014). Equally, France has, in its 2011 Framework Document, identified priority sectors for PCD that are almost identical to those selected by the European Council in November 2009 (Assemblée Nationale, 2014).<sup>5</sup> On the procedural front, too, France has submitted itself to a European Commission-led process aimed at ensuring mutual recognition of procedures across the 'development banks' that act as channels for Commission funds, specifically the AFD, KfW and EIB (Interview with AFD, 2014). In addition, France has signed up to the EU Code of Conduct, the Fast-Track initiative, and joint programming. The French government has, moreover, expressed its readiness to replace its own 'Documents Cadre de Partenariat' with European Country Strategy Papers, although the MFA seems more inclined than the AFD to go down this route (Interviews with senior MFA and AFD officials, 2014).

Even so, it would be wrong to attribute these developments in French ODA entirely to EU pressures. Some changes are the result of domestic budgetary pressures arising out of the 2007 General Review of Public Policy (Balleix, 2010, p. 98), while others may be better explained in terms of the work of the OECD's high-level aid effectiveness forums in Paris, Accra and Busan. The key actor in charge of France's strategy on PCD, the development minister, has lacked commitment, while France has failed to establish its own permanent structure with a mandate to promote and monitor PCD across the 11 French ministries involved in development cooperation (OECD, 2013). In addition, France's own

development coordination mechanisms have remained weak: the Comité Interministériel de Développement International et Coopération, an inter-ministerial aid committee established in 1998, only met twice between 2006 and 2012 (Senate, 2012), while the Conférence d'Orientation Stratégique et de Programmation, a broad-based planning group formed in 2004, has since been disbanded. It is hardly surprising therefore that 'in practice, the choices made in co-ordination forums do not always favour development' (OECD, 2008, p. 33).

It is also not surprising that France's willingness to align to EU procedures has often been highly conditional. Indeed, France is said to have been instrumental in ensuring that the Code of Conduct had no binding legal force, leaving MSs free to evaluate their added value themselves, and making the division of labour among European donors subject to the principle of reciprocity in the case of withdrawal from countries or sectors (Balleix, 2010, p. 102). A similar reticence is likely to mark France's approach to joint programming, once it is required to enter into 'delegated cooperation', or to withdraw from a sector, particularly if French interests are threatened. French officials are already anticipating problems with synchronising project cycles and with resistance from recipient countries concerned about reductions in ODA (Interview with MFA, 2014). They are also anxious about the exclusion of MSs from the initial programming stage, when priority sectors are agreed between EU delegations and partner countries, and are alert to the danger that, due to competitive bidding procedures, joint programming could allow non-EU actors like the World Bank (often likened to 'a steam-roller') to become lead donors (Interview in Brussels, 2014).

France's limited compliance with PCD should not be astonishing given that the agenda has been aptly described by Carbone (2008b) as 'mission impossible'. It could nonetheless be argued that the French have reduced PCD's chances of success even further through norm-stretching. Thus, in 2006, French policy-makers were instrumental in pushing a broad conception of coherence, aimed at classing twelve political sectors as coherent with development policy (Balleix, 2010). In doing so, however, they not only made the task of PCD even more Herculean but also diverted attention from issues like trade and agriculture, which were at the core of this agenda but on which France and the EU were vulnerable to attack due to their support for the EU's potentially damaging farm subsidies (Balleix, 2010). A less subversive example of norm-shifting involves the formation of the African Peace Facility in 2003. This instrument for financing security-related action within the EDF framework was set up with strong backing from France and Britain (Interview with UK Ministry of Defence, 2011). Its establishment was, however only made possible by shifting a long-established norm whereby EDF monies cannot be used in a military capacity.

### **Regime complexity and obstacles to Europeanisation**

It follows from the above that French policy-makers have been adept at resisting or reframing Europeanisation, particularly where it is considered not to be in the national interest. They have been alert to the fact that the EU is moving closer to neoliberal organisations like the World Bank and that successive European enlargements have brought in MSs that do not share French aid priorities and, in the case of the 'Nordic Plus' (the Nordics, Ireland and Britain), actually coordinate their positions ahead of EU meetings (Arts, 2004,



pp. 103–104). In order to avoid the adjustment costs associated with ‘Anglo-Nordic’ forms of Europeanisation, some French decision-makers have drawn upon France’s continued influence within Europe, whether through its 200-strong mission in Brussels, its ranking as the second largest contributor to the EDF and its blocking minority on the Committee on Development Cooperation (CODEV) with Germany (*European Report*, 23 February 2005). These veto players include diplomatic posts, whose staffing levels are threatened by European initiatives such as the Code of Conduct, and which are concerned about the reduced visibility of France’s bilateral programme (Interview with MFA, 2014). The AFD is another veto player which is worried that Europeanisation will encroach on its recently acquired powers and which ‘advocates a more [...] pragmatic approach, respecting the added-value of the various European players involved in development’ (Balleix, 2010, p. 104). Similar concerns have been voiced by French Parliamentarians, who are concerned that insufficient European aid is being allocated to francophone Africa, that too much is going to Chinese contractors, and that the European Commission is demanding higher MS contributions despite doing a poor job of coordination and persistently underspending its commitments (Interview with French Parliamentary Rapporteur, 2014).

Another way in which French policy-makers have skirted around Europeanisation has been by taking advantage of the non-binding nature of EU socialisation pressures in this area of shared EU/MS competence. The fact is that the European Commission has ‘no clear strategy to promote socialization’ (Lightfoot & Szent-Ivanyi, 2014, p. 2) and is rarely considered an authority on aid matters: the EU is not invited to address the AFD after the publication of its annual report whereas the World Bank is (Interview with AFD, 2014). The Commission has, moreover, failed to mobilise sufficiently the energies of French NGOs, many of which continue to follow their own ‘militant’ agenda and are too small to access substantial European funding (Interview with Coordination Sud, 2014).

A final factor that has encouraged and enabled France to reframe Europeanisation has been the aid regime complex. The fact that this complex now includes such a diverse array of actors and norms has increased the transaction costs associated with adhering to some EU pressures. To illustrate, France can no longer undertake further untying safe in the knowledge that other donors will follow suit. Instead, such a step will expose it to increased competition from emerging donors. The fact that the complex contains such a proliferation of aid venues has, moreover, increased the number of focal points around which norms converge and has in the process created political space, sometimes at the expense of the EU, for ‘new’ and more established actors. The former include emerging donors, which have risen to prominence through OECD High-Level forums, where alternatives to the Western development model are now given recognition, and through the G20, whose focus on ‘realist politics’ works against ‘the kind of multilateral norm-based governance approach favoured by the EU’ (Farrell, 2012, p. 242). As to more established powers, France has been among those to benefit from regime complexity. As a leading, well represented donor with its own development vision, France has been well placed to engage in regime-related strategies. It has, for example, forum-shopped outside the EU, initiating the first G20 development ministerial meeting in 2011 and using this venue to push food security and combat agricultural price volatility (OECD, 2013). France has also forum-shopped,

norm-stretched and regime-shifted within the EU, where it has drawn on its agenda-setting powers (notably during French Presidencies), its chairing of the EDF Committee, its activism within weekly CODEV meetings and its linkages to Mediterranean donors within 'Club Med' (Bué, 2011, p. 93).

## Conclusion

This article began by noting how difficult it is to isolate the 'net EU impact' (Levi-Faur, 2004) and by suggesting that regime complexity might provide a useful tool for nuancing claims about Europeanisation, with reference specifically to French ODA. It has shown how France's aid polity and policies underwent only limited Europeanisation over the early decades of European integration and attributed this to France's dominance within Europe and its ability to use the EU as a platform to avoid neoliberal norms emerging across the World Bank-led aid regime.

The late 1990s provided a more propitious climate for Europeanisation with the Jospin reforms, the Commission's norm entrepreneurship and the emergent aid regime complex. The fact that the EU's efforts to embed itself within this complex were coupled with its greater support for neoliberal development orthodoxies, has made it harder for France to defect from EU-backed norms on aid quantity, quality and coherence. While France has responded positively to some EU pressures, notably on PCD, it has generally sought to limit the impact of Europeanisation, with the help of veto players and of the ambiguities created by an aid complex, which has increased the transaction costs of norm compliance, while allowing more wriggle-room for emerging powers and established donors like France.

These findings suggest that, on balance, regime complexity favours great powers, making it easier for them to 'complexify' norms and avoid compliance. This conclusion begs two further questions: how significant is the French case and how useful is regime complexity as a conceptual tool? While France has clearly retained elements of a hard case, resisting and reframing top-down Europeanisation of its bilateral assistance programme, it has also become a more representative, even a prototypical case, as France's use of regime-related strategies to resist Europeanisation is likely to be replicated elsewhere in the EU. Against a backdrop of growing Euroscepticism and continued recession, France is not the only EU MS to be wary of Europeanisation. Many new MSs are reluctant European donors with little interest in development (Lightfoot & Szent-Ivanyi, 2014). Conversely, the UK is a 'good student of development' but views Europeanisation as a process that lowers aid standards (Bué, 2011, p. 94). Following a similar logic, Scandinavian MSs have been 'the most reluctant' to engage in EU initiatives on division of labour, or to participate in EU projects, such as the AITF (Orbie, 2012, p. 27).

Turning finally to the value of regime complexity, this clearly has its limitations in that it adds another layer of complexity to a process, Europeanisation, that is already multifaceted. That said, assuming it is combined with thick description and rigorous interviews, this framework should help to finegrain analyses and identify instances where Europeanisation has been a key driver of policy change. It follows that regime complexity should be used to explore the impact of EU pressures on other MS aid programmes and on related issues such as innovative financing, trade preferences and concessional lending. It is only in this way that the EU's true place in the global jigsaw of aid norms, strategies and forums can be properly understood.

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## Notes

1. One exception is Hofmann's (2009) study of European security.
2. Parallel regimes, where there is no overlap, differ from overlapping regimes, where multiple institutions have authority over an issue, and nested regimes, where institutions are embedded within each other.
3. 'EC' and 'EU' refer, respectively, to the pre- and post-Maastricht years. The abbreviation 'EU' is used throughout this article.
4. Support did nonetheless wane in the late 1990s when the Santer Commission resigned amidst aid scandals involving, among others, France's Commissioner Edith Cresson.
5. France chose trade, immigration, investment and finance, climate change, food security, and social protection, while the EU highlighted trade and finance, climate change, food security, migration and security.

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